

MAR LODGE ESTATE: REVIEW OF SNH MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT WITH THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND, THE DRAFT NTS MANAGEMENT PLAN 2001-2005 AND PROPOSED SNH FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR 2001-2005

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Board on progress with the SNH Management Agreement with The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) on Mar Lodge Estate from the time of its acquisition by the NTS in 1995 to the end of 2000, to review the draft NTS Management Plan 2001-2005 and to set out proposals for SNH funding for the years 2001-2005.

Board Action

2. The Board is invited to:
 - (1) comment on the review of the first 5 years of the SNH management agreement with NTS on Mar Lodge Estate, from 1995-2000;
 - (2) comment on the NTS Management Plan covering the period 2001-2005 and if content to endorse it;
 - (3) endorse the outline programme of SNH funded conservation management projects on the Estate.

SNH approval of the NTS draft Management Plan 2001-2005 and associated SNH funding rests with the Main Board. A previous version of this paper was presented to the East Areas Board for their consideration on 7 September. The EAB received the review of the last 5 years positively and supported the plan for the period 2001-2005. Comments received from the EAB were incorporated into a revised version of the paper which was submitted to the Management Team on 16 October. Comments made by the management Team have been incorporated into this paper for the Main Board. Following the Main Board's response the paper will be sent to the Scottish Executive for their consideration and support.

Background

3. On 30 June 1995, The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) purchased the 29,500 hectares of Mar Lodge Estate (Annex 1). The Estate is located approximately 5 miles west of Braemar and is entirely within the area SNH has recommended for the proposed Cairngorm National Park.

Geology and Geomorphology

4. The Estate contains some of the most important upland natural heritage areas in the United Kingdom. The geology of the Estate consists mainly of a large granite block with Caledonian schists to the East and South. The area has U-shaped valleys, corries and other features characteristic of a glaciated landscape. It has also many “peri-glacial” features (formed by cold climate non-glacial processes). Such is the overall geological and geomorphological importance of the Cairngorms, it has been proposed as a World Heritage Site.

Landscape and Recreation

5. The landscape quality is of national importance and the whole estate is included within the Cairngorm Mountains and Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Areas.
6. The Cairngorms are recognised as containing some of the finest wild land areas in Britain. With 15 “Munros”, the Estate is popular for walking and climbing in summer and, in winter, ski touring and ice climbing.

Nature Conservation

7. The Estate has some of the best arctic-alpine flora in Britain. Over 40% of its area is designated as a site of Special Scientific Interest. Significant areas are also included within the Cairngorms Special Protection Area and candidate Special Area of Conservation. Over one-fifth of the Estate also lies within the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve and two high level lochs, Loch Etchachan and Loch Uaine, are designated as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
8. Habitats of European importance include Caledonian forest, wet and dry heaths, and montane acid grassland. Significant mammal species include red deer, red squirrel, otter and water vole. More recently the main stem of the River Dee has been proposed as a Special Area for Conservation for Atlantic salmon, otter and fresh water pearl mussel with the Estate containing important headwater habitat for the spring run Atlantic salmon. Notable breeding birds include golden eagle, peregrine falcon, dotterel, snow bunting, capercaillie and black grouse.

SNH Management Agreement

9. In June 1995 the Estate was purchased with financial assistance from the Easter Charitable Trust and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, which also provided a substantial sum as an endowment to maintain the property for future generations. SNH is an active partner in managing the Estate, having in 1995 entered into a 25 year management agreement with the NTS. A condition of the agreement is that the management of the Estate will follow an agreed Management Plan comprising a series of 5 year work plans and associated costings. In addition, an annual costed “capital” project programme based on the 5 year plan is to be prepared and agreed with SNH by 1 February every year.

10. The implementation of the agreed 5 year plan is overseen by the Mar Lodge Management Committee on which SNH has a place. This is supplemented by a series of more regular meetings between the SNH Area Manager and other relevant Grampian Area Staff with the NTS Regional Director for North East Scotland. These meetings allow closer monitoring of progress and expenditure. This level of involvement ensures that the work meets the agreed objectives to SNH's satisfaction and that expenditure is closely related to recognised outputs. Should these meetings identify a deviation from, or a serious and unjustifiable failure to achieve the agreed objectives, SNH would be able to withhold payment until the situation was rectified to our satisfaction.

Management Aims and Principles

11. The following aims for the management of Mar Lodge Estate were drawn up by the NTS at the time of acquisition and agreed with SNH in June 1995 as part of the Management Agreement. They provide the framework for management of the Estate and have guided the production of the objectives and prescriptions for management.

- 1) The principal and over-riding aim is to manage the land in a sustainable manner, for the benefit of the nation, ensuring the continuing conservation and restoration of its internationally important geology, flora, fauna, wild land quality and archaeological value.
- 2) Further, to ensure the appropriate access to the land, subject to the maintenance of landscape and nature conservation interests.
- 3) To manage the land as a Highland sporting estate in a manner which is in harmony with the above aims.
- 4) To favour the continuing use of the existing buildings as required including the Lodge itself, providing this does not compromise the wild land quality or conservation of the rest of the Estate.
- 5) To share with the public an appreciation of the issues involved in managing the land as a wild land area, through appropriate interpretation and education.
- 6) To aim to manage the land in a way that enhances the social, economic and cultural well-being of the local community.
- 7) In managing the land, the owners will recognise that it forms part of the wider Cairngorms area.

Review of SNH Management Agreement 1995-2000

12. The NTS draft Management Plan 2001-2005 contains a comprehensive review of progress of the first 5 years of the SNH Management Agreement as detailed in the 1995-2000 NTS Management Plan for the Estate. It contains an evaluation of progress for all 38 objectives and associated prescriptions of the 1995-2000 Management Plan. Rather than comment on all of these, the present paper concentrates on a number of key objectives and provides a summary assessment on the overall progress for the years 1995-2000.

Red Deer Management

13. A key objective of the 1995-2000 Management Plan was to reduce red deer numbers throughout the Estate to a level at which natural regeneration of native woodland habitat takes place. Most effort was concentrated on reducing numbers in the native pinewood regeneration areas to a level at which regeneration of native pinewoods takes place without the use of deer fencing. The longer term objective is to maintain the population at a level which ensures continued regeneration of the native pinewood. To achieve this, specific targets were agreed in 1995, the aim being to halve the 1995 population by the year 2000 to give a total population of 1650, comprising 950 hinds and followers and 700 stags.
14. Despite strenuous efforts to achieve these figures, the populations of stags and particularly hinds still remain significantly above the target populations. By 2000 these were 919 stags and 1701 hinds and followers, giving a total population of some 2700.
15. During 2001 SNH and NTS have carried out a review of the 1995-2005 cull targets, and as a result new targets will be presented as part of the 2001-2005 Management Plan. As part of the review, reasons for not meeting the 2000 target population were examined. The primary factor for the shortfall would appear to be an underestimate of the original population size by as much as 20%. In February 2001, a count by helicopter during a period of snow cover was significantly higher than that expected from ground counts.
16. Using the "true" population size, based on the more accurate helicopter counts, largely explains the slower rate of population decline. Having said this, the population is showing a constant reduction in both numbers and age of the population. For example, from 1995-98, the average age of both hinds and stags shot has declined

Woodlands and Moorland

17. A considerable effort has been made in the first 5 years to establish an audit of the woodland and moorland habitats on the Estate and to design and implement a biological monitoring programme. Although the monitoring transects are showing few young pine trees managing to grow above surrounding vegetation height, the condition of woodlands and moorland habitats have improved significantly since 1995.
18. Good progress has been achieved in removing Scots Pine of non-local provenance and non-native woodland species from the potential regeneration zone with a total of 83.5 hectares felled out of 138.5 hectares. Work has commenced on removing deer fences around the enclosures in Glen Derry during 2000.

Access for Recreation

19. A considerable amount of footpath repair and hill track restoration has been carried out (Annex 2). Pioneering work has been carried out using Remote Accommodation Systems to house footpath workers in very remote areas of the Estate. In particular, the work on restoration of bulldozed tracks originally created to facilitate easier access for sport shooting has been very successful. The track at Beinn a' Bhuidr will be reduced to a footpath as far as the relict woodland in the Quoich by December 2001.

Mountain Bikes

20. A funding condition specified by the Easter Charitable Trust at the time of purchase was that access by mountain bikes would be discouraged and where legally possible, prohibited. To fulfil this condition, the NTS has used the voluntary principle of responsible use of mountain bikes on the wider estate and have used information and education to achieve this aim rather than by enforcement. Signs were erected in various parts of the estate to state that the NTS has a policy of actively discouraging bike access, without actually stating that they were prohibited. SNH has consistently taken the line that any attempt to ban cycling on estate roads was untenable, and that the arguments employed to support such a ban were indefensible. We have stated that there are many tracks on the estate which could accommodate cycling without causing any inconvenience to other visitors or damage or erosion to sensitive nature conservation interests. Accordingly, SNH has advised that the more positive approach is to continue to educate cyclists on appropriate codes of conduct, but advise them of areas where cycling is acceptable (such as on made tracks and rights of way) and which areas are inappropriate for cycling (such as on montane footpaths and plateaux). The reasons for discouraging bikes in the sensitive areas should be made clear to encourage compliance. Recent discussions with the NTS suggests that it is softening its approach to bikes and is engaging in discussions with the Easter Trust to attempt to amend their line. The signs mentioned earlier have been removed.

Visitor Management

21. A comprehensive visitor monitoring system using automated counters has been established and a draft visitor management plan produced. This area of work has progressed at a slower rate than both the NTS and SNH would wish, particularly consultation with local communities and stakeholders and the implementation of an integrated system of signage and interpretation.

Summary

22. Overall progress in the first 5 years of the SNH management agreement has been good with significant progress being made in achieving the principal aims of management. Of particular note has been the very good progress in footpath repair and hill track restoration. Conversely the establishment of new woods and the expansion of existing ones by natural regeneration will take longer than first envisaged as the natural ecological processes have been severely disrupted by past management. The management of red deer

numbers remains critical to the process and it is disappointing that, although significant progress was made, the key target in their reduction was not achieved during the first 5 years.

Review of Finance 1995 - 2001

23. SNH Finance Services staff have reviewed the payments made to NTS under the SNH Management Agreement for the first 5 years and 8 months from 1 July 1995 – 28 February 2001.

24. The NTS received a capital endowment of £8.015 million in 1995 to support the purchase of the Estate. That sum is still intact and has been invested in various ways over the years and now has a market value according to the latest NTS accounts of £12.787 millions. The Endowment currently produces an annual income investment of about £0.450 million. The sum is used to support the Mar Lodge Estate Property Account, including Estate project net “capital” costs.

Mar Lodge Estate Property Account

25. Mar Lodge Estate Property Account includes 2 distinct elements, estate income and expenditure which receives SNH revenue support on specified activities, and Estate “Capital” projects to which SNH contributes on a discretionary basis on appropriate eligible projects at usually but not exclusively 50% of costs.

Mar Lodge Estate Property Capital

26. During the 5 years 8 months, the cost and funding sources for “capital” projects have totalled just under £2.1 millions; provided (approximately) by:

	£ MILLION
SNH	0.280
EC Structural Funds	0.227
Heritage Lottery Fund	0.529
Other External (largely Easter Charitable Trust)	0.468
NTS (Property Reserve/ Endowment)	0.594
TOTAL	£2.098

SNH Grampian Area has approved and monitored all of this expenditure on a project by project basis. A full inventory of all SNH funded “capital” projects is found in Annex 3.

Mar Lodge Estate Property Revenue

27. The NTS Regional staff prepared a very helpful summary of all revenue income and expenditure, year by year, covering the 5 years and 8 months to 28 February 2001. This summary was the basis of a very productive meeting between SNH finance staff and NTS on 14 August 2001. A copy of the detailed summary will be available for inspection at the Board meeting.

28. The summary statement contains details of how the actual SNH support is directed. As set out in the agreement SNH contributes a varying percentage of the net costs of Estate activities as follows.

	Total Net Cost £ Million	SNH Share
Countryside	0.657	60%
Forestry	0.281	30%
Property Management	0.547	25%
Buildings	0.178	0%
Holiday Accommodation	(0.062)	0%
Management Recharges	0.393	0%
Total Net Cost	£1.994 million	£0.616 million

29. "Countryside" costs relate to the employment and deployment costs associated with the stalking team, the rangers and ecologist. "Forestry" comprises the costs of the forestry team net of any income generated by timber sales. This team also undertakes ongoing track and path maintenance. "Property Management" refers to the costs of employing and supporting the estate Property Manager and Smiths Gore as land agents. Over the period (68 months) SNH's computed share of the net revenue costs amounted to £0.616 million.

Financial Summary 1995-2001

30. Overall the total Mar Lodge Estate funding position during the period (68 months) was:

	£ Million
Net revenue costs	(1.994)
SNH contribution to net revenue costs	0.616
Balance of net revenue costs	(1.378)
Contribution to "capital" projects	(0.594)
Total call on Endowment Fund	(1.972)
Less: Investment Income	2.268
Less: Realised gains on investments	0.120
Balance in Property Reserve Account	0.416

31. The closing balance in the Property Reserve Account is ring fenced and will be used to fund expected net deficits on the Estate Property Account over the next 45 years. The total SNH contribution to Mar Lodge Estate during the 68 months has been just over £0.900 million, averaging out at £0.16 million per annum, but currently running at about £0.200 million per annum.

32. The overall costs to SNH in the first 68 months of the management agreement has largely been in line with expectations, given that there was some underspend in the early years as the delivery programme was put in place.
33. SNH Financial Services staff, whilst not carrying out a full scale audit, have a considerable degree of confidence in the NTS financial reporting systems and the staff who operate them. It is their view that NTS has demonstrated a high degree of accountability, transparency and accuracy in its forecasted and actual costs.

NTS Management Plan 2001-2005

34. The objectives and prescriptions of the NTS Management Plan for Mar Lodge Estate from 2001-2005 are included in annex 4. In summary they build upon the 1995-2000 Management Plan and are fully compatible with the aims, principles and objectives of the SNH Management Agreement.
35. There is again a strong emphasis on deer management, specifically the reduction in numbers to create conditions suitable for natural regeneration, while also maintaining a lettable sporting cull. Recently SNH and NTS met to finalise revised population and cull targets and these are contained in Annex 5. In summary, the intention is to reduce the deer population to 1848 animals by 2005 which will necessitate very heavy culling from 2002-2004. This will cater for uncertainties in the population parameters, particularly calving rates and absolute population size.
36. Elsewhere in the Management Plan, the NTS at the request of SNH has introduced the concept of key performance indicators. Judging the success or otherwise of management is, by the nature of tasks undertaken, often complicated. Nevertheless it is important to try and evaluate the success of management and a number of criteria or key performance indicators have been established on which to measure the success. These will be reviewed annually and discussed with SNH and other relevant bodies.
37. Listed below are a number of these key performance indicators.

Prescription 5.1 – Regeneration

By the end of 2005 all eleven regeneration transects will have no more than 15% of pine seedlings below the vegetation and 25% above the vegetation damaged in any one year. Detailed percentage survival of seedlings will be agreed with SNH in each transect by the end of 2002.

Prescription 6.1 – Felling of non-native conifers

During the first five years, 87.5 hectares (63%) of all non-native conifers have been felled. It is planned to fell a further 40 hectares over the next 5 years.

Prescription 6.2 – Fence removal

A further 10,000 metres (14%) of deer fencing will be removed subject to funding. This will mean that a total of 33,760 metres (45%) of deer fencing will have been removed out of a total of 69,276 metres.

Prescription 10.1 – Moorland Condition

A Moorland Condition Assessment will be carried out during the summer 2001. The data obtained will be compared to the 1995/96 survey and targets set for particular 1 km squares with heavy deer grazing levels and/or a percentage reduction in heavily grazed squares to be met by the end of the 5 year period.

Prescription 11.1 – Habitat Action Plan

A Habitat Action Plan for wetland and riparian areas will be produced which covers issues such as flood control, riparian and flood plain management and fish translocation by the end of 2003.

Prescription 14.2 – Track Removal

A further 4527 metres (6%) of hill tracks will be removed completely or reduced to footpath by the end of 2005. This will mean that a total of 11,479 metres (16%) will have been removed out of a total of 71,800 metres of hill tracks.

Prescriptions 15.1 and 15.2 – Footpaths

A footpath audit will be carried out in 2001 and a target set for a total distance of footpath repair that will be carried out by 2005. The footpath audit will also set out a repair and maintenance schedule for footpaths.

Since the Management Team meeting, NTS has contacted SNH to inform us of a proposed bid to the European Objective 2 fund "Sustainable Tourism" for additional funds for footpath and track work. At the time of drafting this paper the details of the proposed bid have not been clarified. In essence, the proposal is to draw on the SNH and NTS capital money already indicated for footpath works in the proposed expenditure programme, supplement this with some additional funds to create a funding package allowing footpath works to be increased 5 fold. The funding package would draw on 27.5% each from SNH and NTS, and 45% from Objective 2. The Area is currently investigating the proposal in detail and relating it to the proposed capital footpath and track programme presented with this paper. An assessment will consider the detailed costs associated with the proposal in relation to funds already allocated notionally to track and footpath works in the capital programme for 2001-2005. The scale and affordability of any increased SNH contribution, the value for money, and the projected savings for future works will also be taken into account. It is anticipated that a verbal update on this proposal and any consequences on the expenditure programme will be presented at the Board meeting.

Prescription 17.1 – Access to areas where sport shooting takes place

By the end of 2001, a leaflet will be produced on the philosophy of the sporting activity on the estate including quality of experience of stalking on the estate, the fact that cull targets relate to the carrying capacity of the natural heritage and that stags are culled over the entire age range.

Prescription 19.1 and 19.3 – Visitor reception and interpretation

By the end of 2001, a booklet on the estate will be produced together with a leaflet on “wild” camping and small information boards located at Braemar Youth Hostel and Rucksacks (a private hostel) in Braemar.

By the end of 2005, prepare and implement plans for visitor reception at the Linn of Dee Car Park.

Summary of 2001-2005 Management Plan

38. The original aims of management remain in the revised and updated Management Plan for 2001-2005. However, the first 5 years experience of management has made NTS and SNH aware of new opportunities and constraints. The management of deer numbers remains critical to the process of woodland regeneration and general habitat restoration. The adoption of key performance indicators and clear targets for deer reduction and woodland regeneration, which also includes contingency planning to deal with slippage in the early years of the Plan, is considered a significant improvement in the measurement of success and is something which has been welcomed by the NTS.
39. There is considerable scope for learning from the past 5 years of experience and to pursue lines of research and study that will enable the NTS and others involved in upland land management to develop expertise to protect and enhance the natural heritage and its public enjoyment.
40. The Management Plan for 2001-2005 continues to promote the Estate's wild qualities, reasserting natural processes and adopting minimum intervention as the key mechanisms for change. An important aspect of the 2001-2005 plan is restoration of damaged areas, for example through the removal or downgrading of modern vehicle tracks and restructuring woodland plantations.
41. The degree to which the public will use the estate is likely to increase. The Plan continues the welcoming approach to public access, promoting walks for all abilities and sectors of society. Central to the approach for the management of the more remote areas is to promote the long walk in, ensuring that the Estate remains a wild and challenging place.
42. The property will play a significant role in the proposed Cairngorms National Park, providing access and enjoyment for local people and visitors. In terms of consultation and engagement with local communities, particularly the villages of Braemar and Inverey, the 2001-2005 plan could be more proactive in seeking their support and where appropriate, their involvement. Equally the resourcing and deployment of rangers on the Estate is an issue which we have

raised a concern and which NTS has agreed to review and agree with SNH before the new plan is confirmed

Cost/Revenue predictions for 2001-2005

43. The NTS has supplied SNH with the cost and revenue predictions for the next five years. Inflation has been assumed at 3% per annum and staffing, cost and income levels reflect activity in the draft Management Plan. The Plan costings were, however, produced before the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease became apparent.

44. SNH's share of the net revenue costs remain unchanged although there has been some restructuring of the 5 years' revenue income and expenditure to provide greater transparency and accountability. This is expected to have no impact on SNH support which is detailed below:

	Total Net Cost £ millions	SNH share
Countryside	0.292	60%
Ecology	0.095	60%
Ranger	0.351	60%
Stalking and Shooting	0.382	60%
Forestry	0.184	30%
Property Management	0.375	25%
Buildings	0.297	0%
Holiday Accommodation	(0.222)	0%
Management Recharges	0.622	0%
Total Net Cost	£2.376 million	£0.821 million

45. SNH's annual share of revenue costs is projected to rise from £0.144 million in 2001 to £0.169 million in 2005, largely reflecting the impact of the inflation assumption, but with some variation in years 2 and 3 to reflect increased deer culling activity to meet Management Plan priority objectives.

46. The forward programme on "capital" projects (annex 2) is costed at £1.411 million, with indications of resources being provided as follows:

	£ millions
SNH	0.339
EC Structural Funds	0.464
Heritage Lottery Fund	0.218
Other External Sources	0.056
NTS (Property Reserve/ Endowment)	0.334
Total	£1.411 million

47. The projected impact on the Property Reserve Account during the five year period to 2005 is therefore likely to be:

	£ millions
Net Reserve Costs	(2.376)
SNH contribution to net revenue costs	0.821
Balance of net revenue costs	(1.555)
Contribution to "capital" projects	(0.334)
Total call on Endowment Fund	(1.889)
Less: Investment Income	2.508
Less: Realised gains on investment	0.000
Increase in Property Reserve Account	0.619

48. The NTS has stated that the investment income assumptions (currently based on 3% growth rate) might prove optimistic. A reduction of over 10% over the 5 year period would reduce the increase in the Property Reserve Account to £0.368 million, once again ring-fenced to meet future deficits arising towards the end of the 50 year endowment period. This seems reasonable and sets a target range for a further review at the end of the next 5 year period.
49. The indicative total contribution of SNH over the next five years is stated at £1.160 million, or an average of £0.232 million per year as against £0.205 million in 2000. Assuming an inflation rate of 3% and a more evenly spread "capital" projects programme, this represents a very small increase in real terms.
50. In conclusion, the overall costs/impact on SNH and NTS over the next 5 years is expected to be similar in real terms to the first 5 years. However, the management of the "capital" project programme will require careful management to even out spending of SNH/ NTS contributions. There is in addition some uncertainty on project delivery arising from the impact of Foot and Mouth Disease and the heavier red deer culls required in 2002 and 2003.

General Conclusion

51. In conclusion, the review of the first 5 years of the SNH Management Agreement on Mar Lodge Estate, as contained in the NTS Management Plan for 1995-2000 has shown good overall progress in meeting the objectives and priorities of management, particularly in footpath repair and track restoration. Conversely, progress with reducing the deer population has not reached target level and consequently there has been little natural regeneration of woodland outside fenced plantations.
52. The overall costs and impact on SNH in the first 5 years has been in line with the expectations of the SNH Management Agreement.
53. The proposals for the years 2001-2005 build upon those outlined for the previous 5 years with a strong emphasis on the need to reduce the red deer population significantly early in the Plan period. Revised targets will be set and monitored in association with the Deer Commission Scotland and East

Grampian Deer Management Group. The introduction of key performance indicators is a welcome benchmark to gauge progress and if necessary to implement remedial action.

54. The financial cost to SNH for the period 2001-2005 is expected to be similar, in real terms, but careful management of the “capital” Project programme is required to even out a high proposed spend in the early years and to take into account uncertainties surrounding the impacts of Foot and Mouth Disease.
55. Subject to approval by the Main Board, SNH will be making a substantial financial contribution to both the delivery of conservation management at Mar Lodge and of the wider objectives of the Cairngorms National Park. This is particularly important in terms of public bodies providing resources to support the work of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and its management plan.

Recommendation

56. The East Areas Board considered this paper at their meeting on 7 September 2001 and supported in principle the outline programme of SNH funding towards the implementation of the NTS Management Plan on Mar Lodge Estate for the period 2001-2005. The SNH Management Team has given further support and has provided comments for the revision of this paper.
57. The Board is requested to review the first 5 years of the SNH Management Agreement and to provide comment and advice to staff in finalising the review. In addition the Board is requested to approve the management plan for the next 5 years (2001-2005) and the associated revenue and capital costs. If content, the Board is recommended to approve the SNH contribution to this plan in the order of £0.821 million towards revenue costs and £0.339 million towards capital works. If during the course of the next 5 years significant changes are required to the SNH funding level as the result of proposed amendments to the plan, the support of the Board would be sought first.

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5 October 2001